



Plum Lines

A Quarterly Publication of The Wodehouse Society

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May 1989

WCY + 8

First-fruits of a GENIUS

In rummaging through your attic recently, did you come across the manuscript of *Hamlet*, autographed by Shakespeare? No? Or a first edition of *Don Quixote*, autographed by Cervantes? Too bad. We all have those off days. Well, here's a picture of something almost as good. It's a fly-leaf of a first edition of Plum's first novel *Pothunters*, autographed by him and presented to his friend William Townend just ten days after the publication date. Mrs. Margaret Slythe, Head of the Library at Dulwich College, sent me this photocopy "from a very battered *Pothunters* in the Wodehouse Memorial Library." It's satisfying to remember that the twenty-year-old author's prediction came true, though not quite as soon as he indicated.

To William Townend
these first-fruits
of
a
GENIUS
at which
the
WORLD
will
(shortly)
be
AMAZED
(you see if it won't)
from
the author
P.G. Wodehouse

Sep 28. 1902

A few quick ones

Our Supplement in this issue is by Norman Ward, so I'd better tell you a little about him. Norman is a retired professor who lives, as you will guess after reading the Supplement, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. In that euphoniously named city he has written three books of humor, all with entrancing names. I've read the only one still in print, *Mice in the Beer*, and it's a delight. It won the Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour in 1961. More about this book in the August *Plum Lines*.

Norman's books remind me that our Society is bursting with published authors. Offhand I can think of Norman Ward, John Duffie, Isaac Asimov, David Jasen, James Heineman, Joseph Connolly, Norman Murphy, Richard Osborne, George Will, and William Sarjeant, and I'm willing to bet a nickel there are more.

Correction: the abbreviation of the Queen Mother's title was incorrect in the February membership list. I listed her title as HRH (Her Royal Highness), but we know she is a Majesty. The correct abbreviation is HM (Her Majesty). I regret the error.

Subterranean forces are at work in our little community, as shown by the following note from William Bentsen in Lake Geneva:

This is to report officially that the Society's only Lake Geneva (Wisconsin, that is) member and the only French member, both noted as new members in the February *Plum Lines*, duly met and exchanged credentials on April 24. We thereupon created the Lake Geneva Section and the Paris Section of the Society, and elected officers. I am pleased to report that I am Honorable President of the Lake Geneva Section and Monsieur Lafont is Honorable President of the Paris Section. Future pleasant and productive joint meetings of the two Sections are confidently anticipated."

"She is very far from being one of the boys. You needn't let it get about, of course, but that girl, to my certain knowledge, plays the organ in the local church and may often be seen taking soup to the deserving villagers with many a gracious word."

No entries yet in The Great Barribault's Contest. I'm sure this means you're so busy working on the problem that you haven't time to write.

President Bill Blood sends this quote about a writer we all admire:

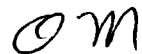
He was born with a rare aptness for the telling of tales, and with a greedy fondness for them. A story and a leave to tell a story were what he most wanted in life. To read and to tell stories made up the law of his being, which men of genius obey.

"This could very truly have been said of P.G. Wodehouse," writes Bill, "but John Masefield said it of Chaucer."

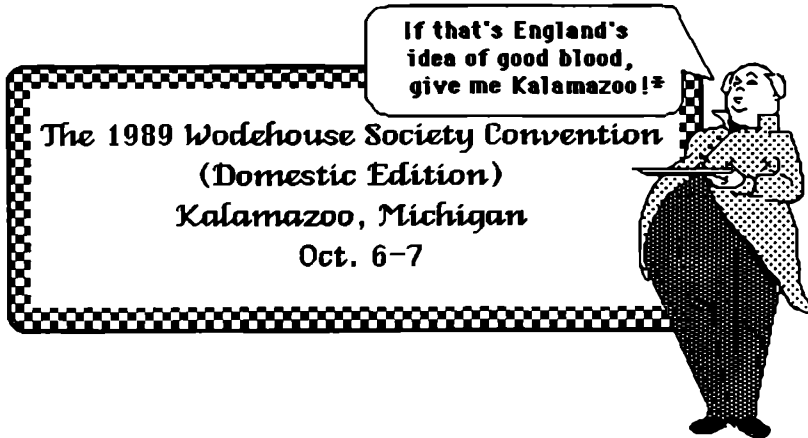
Richard Osborne has sent word, via Pauline Blanc, of the recent death of Mrs. Thelma Cazalet-Keir at the age of 89. She was a former Conservative MP, Governor of the BBC, and ardent feminist. But Wodehouse fans have a more personal interest: she was the sister-in-law of Plum's dearly loved step-daughter Leonora, and thus a relative by marriage to Plum. She edited *Homage to Wodehouse*, a collection of tributes appearing in 1973. She must have been one of the last of the generation that could have considered Wodehouse a contemporary.

Richard notes that she was "an aunt figure, perhaps nearer to Lady Constance than Dahlia Travers. But she played tennis at Wimbledon."

Bill Blood has just been informed by the publisher of *Victoria* magazine that its feature article about Plum, scheduled for the May issue, has been delayed till October.



The Oldest Member



*Spoken by J. Preston Peters in *Something Fresh* (Methuen & Co.) p. 245.

Text by Jim Thorne, logo by Bob Griffin

The Kalamazoo contingent welcomes you to our pleasant city, located halfway between and in line with Chicago and Detroit. Our city is the home of Kalamazoo College, the site of our convention, as well as a university and two other colleges. The world headquarters of the Upjohn Pharmaceutical Company is here. The country's first permanent downtown mall was established here in 1957. Community theaters, a fine symphony orchestra and a junior symphony orchestra, the Kalamazoo Chamber Music Society (a world class ensemble), and the Kalamazoo Art Institute combine with the college drama and music departments to provide the denizens of the city with a lively cultural ambience (if that's the word I want).

The program is taking form. We invite you to make a 20- to 25-minute presentation if you wish. Please send your title and a brief description to me. If you cannot be on hand to deliver your paper, send it along and one of us will read it. (It has been done this way before.) Victoria McClure has agreed to make a contribution. Your read her delightful *Plum Lines* Supplement in the November 1988 issue. Vice President and Historian Phil Ayers has agreed to report on the Dulwich section of the 1989 convention.

There will be opportunities during the tea breaks and luncheon period to purchase old trade books. At least one of our members, a professional book tradesman, will be on hand to help us enhance our collections. Bring your duplicate books and your checkbooks.

Housing The most convenient as well as the most charming accommodations are the six beautifully restored bed-and-breakfasts. There are motels and a convention center also. We have not reserved any block of rooms, so if you know you will be coming, let me know and I'll send you brochures so you can make your housing arrangements.

A registration form (with cost data) for the convention will appear in the August issue of *Plum Lines*. Maps, accommodation lists, etc., will be mailed to registrants.

October temperatures in southern Michigan are apt to be around 55 degrees, according to the *Farmers' Almanac*. The leaves are beautifully colored in October. It's one of the best times of the year here in Kalamazoo, and we're certain you will enjoy your visit.

A melancholy-looking man, he had the appearance of one who has searched for the leak in life's gas-pipe with a lighted candle.

"The Man Who Disliked Cats", *The Man Upstairs*, 1914

Crumpets, beans, and eggs

Alex Hemming and John Duffie's daughter Maureen Martin found an item in the London *Evening Standard* of January 9 giving Plum credit for an early use of "crumpet" to denote a man:

The experts at Longman think the term "crumpet" as applied to men worthy of inclusion in their dictionary of new words. But...the word has a much better and longer pedigree than Longman suggest. P G Wodehouse divided the members of the Drones, his fictional gentlemen's club, into Eggs, Beans and Crumpets as long ago as 1937.

PGW used the term a good deal earlier than that, and his wasn't the first such use. The first edition of the Oxford English Dictionary is silent on the subject, but its recent Supplement gives these examples of what it defines as "a trivial term of endearment."

1900 G. Swift, *Somerty*, "You're Ophelia, Scrubby; but don't you go winking at the johnnies in the stalls, you giddy little crumpet!"

1920 *Punch*, "Don't, Percival, old crumpet."

1923 Wodehouse, *The Inimitable Jeeves*, "I say, old crumpet..."

These quotes suggest that the word may have come up in the world.

Jeeves and the absolute being

Jonathan Hopson, our member for Deeside, found this passage in praise of the novel *Jeeves in War in Heaven*, published in 1930, one of the metaphysical thrillers written by Charles Williams, associate of C.S. Lewis and Dorothy Sayers. Jonathan writes that "The context of the passage is quite appropriate: the hero forces the villain to reveal his own worthlessness by confessing a complete and utter ignorance of the works of Wodehouse!" The passage praising *Jeeves* is as follows:

Now, about beans. Again the first quotes are in the recent Supplement, where "old bean" (but not "bean" alone) is defined as "a familiar form of address." The earliest quotes are these:

1917 "Contact" *Airman's Outings*, Chorus - "Goodnight, old bean."

1918 *Blighty Christmas*, "No earthly reason, old bean!"

1920 *Punch*, "...the child of two and a half years who addressed her learned parent as "Old bean."

No Wodehouse quotes in this entry, although the quotes extend to 1955.

Egg, like bean, is, in the opinion of the OED and its Supplement, always modified when denoting a person or (non-egg) object. The modifier may be "bad" (first quote 1855), "good" (first quote 1903), or "tough" (first and only quote 1938 in Wodehouse, *Summer Lightning*).

Other writers used these words in the same sense as Wodehouse, used them earlier, and applied them more broadly. In the OED quotes, they always used the words with adjectives. If my memory is right Wodehouse used them, nearly always without adjectives, in just one way: as generic names for members of the Drones Club. And of course no one ever used them to better effect.

One shouldn't snigger over *Jeeves* any more than one should snivel over *Othello*. Perfect art is beyond these emotions. I think *Jeeves* - the whole book, preferably with the illustrations - one of the final classic perfections of our time. It attains absolute being. *Jeeves* and his employer are one and yet diverse. It is the *Don Quixote* of the twentieth century.

So there!

"I have got to take a few pints of soup to the deserving poor," said Myrtle. "I'd better set about it. Amazing the way these bimbos absorb soup. Like sponges."

"Anselm Gets His Chance", *Eggs, Beans and Crumpets*, 1940

Announcing the great Scrimgeour contest

Elliott Milstein sponsored three of our new members listed elsewhere in this issue: Kenneth Fink, Richard Scrimgeour, and Bridget Campion. Does that name Scrimgeour ring a Wodehousean bell in the dark recesses of your memory? If so, you may win the prize in this great new contest. Elliott is offering "a special prize to anyone who can spot the one reference to Scrimgeour in the Wodehouse canon." The name isn't listed in Dan Garrison's *Who's Who in Wodehouse*, nor as far as I can see, in any other Wodehouse reference book. Let's hear from you photographic-memory people out there!*

John Duffie

Most of you will remember that our November 1988 *Plum Lines* included a page by John Duffie, TWS, describing his favorite Wodehouse short stories and asking other members to write to him about their favorites.

I'm sorry to tell you that John died at his home in Vancouver, British Columbia, early in February. His daughter tells me our Society meant a great deal to him, and a number of us have happy memories of him at the 1987 San Francisco convention. Since his death I've learned that he was a popular and much loved columnist for *Monday* magazine in Vancouver. A collection of his work almost won the 1982 Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour. One of the many tributes published after his death:

Many people will remember John's unflinching defense of the English language, his declarations of admiration toward those who use it with skill, his friendly jabs at those who unintentionally misuse it, and his unrelenting disdain for those who knowingly abuse it. John's endearing and enduring strength was that his defence of social justice and human dignity was equally clear.

It's hard when we lose a man like that.

It was a poetic drama, and the audience, though loath to do anybody an injustice, was beginning to suspect that it was written in blank verse.

What happened to Jeeves?

Jeeves was a flop. Not the man, but the 1975 British musical. Wodehouse himself had nothing to do with the show, of course. But how could a musical comedy about such a popular character, with a book by a highly successful playwright and music by a talented and experienced theatrical composer, end in complete disaster? The story of the failure is told by Laurie Werner in *Northwest Portfolio*, the Northwest Airlines magazine of March 1989, provided for us by Bill Horn.

Alan Ayckbourn, a British playwright with a string of London and New York successes before and after *Jeeves*, teamed up with Andrew Lloyd Webber, composer of *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Cats*, among other musicals. Ayckbourn had five hits running simultaneously in the West End when he began work on *Jeeves*. Webber, for his part, wrote what has been called some of his most tuneful work for *Jeeves* - "deftly crafted, almost quaintly old-fashioned tunes." What could go wrong with such a production?

The collaboration was doomed from the very start, according to the article. Ayckbourn says, "...one night over dinner I casually asked Andrew who was writing the lyrics. 'I assumed you were,' he said. I was astonished; I'd never written a lyric in my life. But as it turned out we were all doing things we had never done. We had a choreographer and a director who'd never worked on a musical. Andrew had never written a musical [with instruments], he'd only written electronic musicals. He had to fly in arrangers from the States to show him how to score strings for the theater." There's more, and it's just as bad. The musical must have provided wonderful practice for everyone involved.

And *that's* what happened to *Jeeves*.



Jill the Reckless, 1921

* Late word: there are two references, and PGW spells it Scrymgeour.

We're Sitting Pretty again!

Sitting Pretty, the last of the Bolton-Wodehouse-Kern musicals, was heard in April of this year for the first time since its original production in 1924. Bill Horn and Jan Kaufman sent me word about this series of five concert performances in New York City, reported in *The New York Times* of April 9.

This is not only the first revival of the show, but the first time in 65 years that songs from the show have been heard. Jerome Kern never allowed these songs to be broadcast or performed, according to John McGlinn, conductor of the revival. "He wanted the score to be heard only in the theatre, in the context for which it had been created." As a result of this ban the score and script dropped from sight for decades and were unearthed only recently.

McGlinn discussed Plum's contributions to the show at some length. "It may be Wodehouse's greatest gift as a lyricist that he is capable of retaining a true warmth and genuine sincerity at the core of even his most frivolous lyrics. In song after song, you get the feeling that he really believes this stuff...Wodehouse, the most forgotten and underappreciated of the great lyricists, makes a contribution to the score that is as vital as Kern's, for the lyrics help paint a picture of idealized happiness as moving as it is simple. Wodehouse takes the commonest elements of daily life and transmutes them into the apotheosis of loving and being loved. In Wodehouse's world, Paradise isn't a castle in Spain - it's a bungalow in Quogue, and you reach it by riding the Magic Train (a k a the Long Island Rail Road)."

The show was written as a sister act, and when the sisters cast for the part had to be replaced before opening night by unrelated actresses, the show was greatly weakened. It closed after only 95 performances.

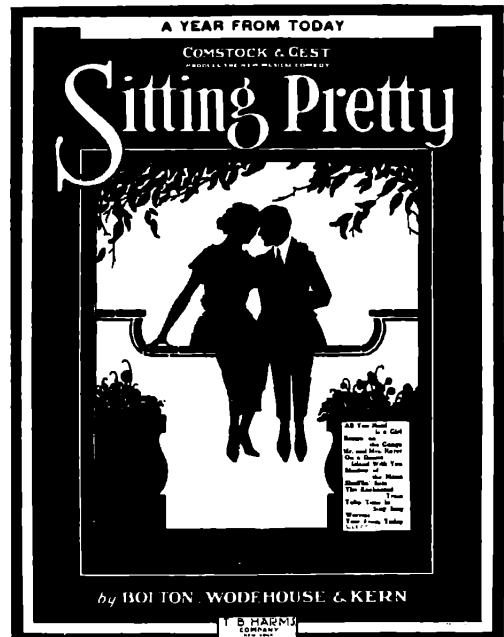
But Wodehouse salvaged something from the ruins. He adapted the plot for his novel *Bill the Conqueror*. And he used a song title from the show in "The Ordeal of Osbert Mulliner," when J. Bashford Braddock, the explorer, thought better of his plan to trample Osbert with spiked boots and instead told him he was returning immediately to Bongo on the Congo.

Does anybody know whether this musical was related to the Clifton Webb movie of the same name?

The Wodehouse Pilgrimage



Pauline Blanc, our committee chair, reports that our arrangements are in good order and everyone is looking forward to a wonderful trip. At the moment we expect to have 22 people on the Pilgrimage, including Col. Murphy, our guide. At the Dulwich College banquet we will be joined by several special guests, some members of the College staff, and Mr. and Mrs. C. Godbold, TWS members who live near the College. In Shrewsbury two new members, Jim and Margaret Earl, who live near by, will have dinner with us at the Lion and Pheasant Hotel. We look forward to their company.



Something new

Len Lawson

There are relationships that withstand all manner of adversity and there are those that fold at the slightest provocation. One would think that a relationship that has lasted over 50 years would withstand any abuse. Such is not the case however. Ill feelings and bitterness are liable to crop up at any time. Due to considerable ill feeling, and not a little bitterness, I am pleased to announce that I have parted company with my gall bladder. We all gain from these little nuisances and you dear reader most of all. My column will be mercifully short this time as I am still restoring my tissues.

Recorded Books, Inc., Box 409, Charlotte Hall MD 20622, offer a 60 minute audio cassette, order 89372, containing the two George Orwell essays, "In Defence of P.G. Wodehouse" and "Rudyard Kipling." The cassette is available for purchase only at \$7.95 plus \$3.25 S&H. The toll-free number for orders is 1-(800)-638-1304 and they take plastic.

Pauline Blanc tells me that she has seen Richard Osborne's *A Wodehouse Companion* in a San Francisco book store for \$7.95. This is the Penguin edition I mentioned last time. It is a fine book which I recommend highly. I am pleased to see that it is available here in the U.S. [Robert Di Tolla also spotted this book in New York City. -- OM]

Jan Kaufman has discovered *Proposals: A Lover's Anthology* in a catalog she received recently that sells the latest from London. The book sells for 12.95 pounds sterling, and there is a mention of P.G. Wodehouse in the blurb. I would like to hear more about this. Will some kind soul please let me know which Wodehouse item or items are included?

Bill Horn, who is a kind soul and provides a raft of information, has struck again. In the March 1989 issue of *Northwest Portfolio*, the magazine for Northwest Airlines, there is an article on Alan Ayckbourn. He discusses his musical *Jeeves* that flopped. Bill also sent an article on Jerome Kern from the *N.Y. Times* of April 9, 1989, page 23. There is quite a bit about PGW also. [See articles on pages 5 and 6. - OM]

Let me know if you see anything by or about P.G. Wodehouse. I'll bung it down here for the benefit of the rest of the membership.

A couple of items received at the last minute:

Bill Blood has recently received Catalogue No. 2 from Book Finders International, 216 Ringwood Lane, Elgin SC 29045. The catalog is all about PGW books, with a first edition of *The Pothunters* offered for \$1500.

The Dutch newsletter *Nothing Serious* includes an important announcement from Hawthorne Books, Bristol, England: the long-awaited McIlvaine/Heinemann Wodehouse bibliography is scheduled to be published by St. Paul's Bibliography in the U.K. next October at approximately 60 pounds sterling - at the present exchange rate, roughly U.S. \$100.

"It promises," says Hawthorne, "to be much more comprehensive and extensive than any other bibliography published so far, and special attention is being paid to dust wrappers. The book will be illustrated by Peter Van Straaten." He is an excellent illustrator of Wodehouse. See his endpapers in *A Centenary Celebration*.

"There is a problem though - the print run will be too small (probably 500) and there may well not be enough copies to go around - of the first printing anyway..."

The announcement gives instructions for reserving a copy from Hawthorne. Let me know soon if you are interested and I will send you the instructions.

Does The Wodehouse Society want to buy a copy for Society ownership and use? I expect a lot of us would like to have access to it, but can't justify buying such an expensive book for our individual use. With joint ownership the book could be shared. If we want to buy a copy I think we should act soon.

-- OM

Of sallies and thrusts

Bill Blood

True Wodehouseans have long known that the literate people of the world are divided into two distinct groups: those who read and enjoy the stories of Pelham Grenville Wodehouse and those who do not. Of the second group, some few go so far as to publicly state that Plum has been overrated, and that he has contributed nothing beyond escapism to the world.

The following scathing remarks were gleaned from the supposedly authoritative volume, *The New Guide to World Literature*, by Martin Seymour-Smith (who is, I am sure, a literary scholar, entitled to have his opinions heard), Peter Bedrick Books, London, 1985. He terms Plum's admirer's "A cult which takes him to be a great writer, a master of style, creator of a convincing and truly imagined world. This is not so." Having forcibly gained our attention, he follows with this dictum: "No novelist who cannot convey a sense of the real can be major. It is foolish to try to make an occasionally gorgeous entertainer into a great writer."

Plum had ruefully noted this supercilious attitude when, in 1956, he said in an interview, "I don't know whether you have seen someone looking askance at something, but that is how the public looks at the authors of what is known in the trade as "light writing." In some states, I believe, it is legal to hunt them with dogs."

Henry Smith Williams (1863-1943) phrased it more wisely than did Mr. Seymour-Smith when he wrote, "An author writes to be read, and in the last resort the only criterion as to the value of his work is found in the preservation or neglect of that work by future generations of readers."

New members

Jeeves let his brain out another notch.
The Mating Season, 1949

Last minute news: Robert Di Tolla, one of our stalwart New York members, wrote me recently that the Strand Book Company in New York City has imported a number of inexpensive Wodehouse books. I bought one just to have a look, and I'm delighted with it. My book is *Something Fresh*, published by Century Hutchinson, London, 1986. It's 5.5 by 8.5 inches, hardcover, bound in dark brown cloth. The dust wrapper depicts J. Preston Peters in a state of eruption. The end papers feature the Empress of Blandings.

From the inside front flap of the dust wrapper: "Hutchinson announces an elegant New Autograph Edition of the best novels and short stories of P.G. Wodehouse. Spaciously and attractively designed, these books will fulfil a long-felt need for a handsome standard edition [of his works]." If my book is typical, I'm in complete agreement. Someone at Strand told me, by phone, that all the books listed here are in "a uniform edition," meaning, I suppose, that they are all in the New Autograph Edition. The books are new.

Prices, as you can see, are \$4.95 and \$5.95 - remarkable for such well designed and well made hardcover books.

-- OM, May 29, 1989

WODEHOUSE, P.G. - Strand is pleased to present a large selection of stories by the one and only Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, unchallenged master of the English comic story. Millions of devoted fans on both sides of the Atlantic have chortled for years at the antics of Bertie Wooster and his indomitable butler, Jeeves, at the notorious Mr. Mulliner and the redoubtable Psmith, the denizens of Blandings Castle, and all the other improbable characters who populate Wodehouse's witty tales. Here they all are, in an assortment of classic titles specially imported from Britain.

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Plum's Canada

Norman Ward

Reprinted from *Queen's Quarterly*, Summer 1983

"I returned this morning from Niagara Falls," P.G. Wodehouse wrote to his friend Bill Townend on 16 December 1949, "where I crossed to the Canadian side, spent a couple of nights and came back into the USA on the quota, thus stabilizing my position and avoiding having to keep getting renewals on my visitor's visa." The celebrated creator of that prototype of the gentleman's gentleman, Jeeves, went on to deplore the red tape that by 1949 had overtaken the crossing of international boundaries, involving not only documents but chest x-rays and promises not to overthrow the American government by force; in his own hot youth, Wodehouse added, one could simply decide to visit America, and go. He finally became an American citizen (albeit one, at the very end of a long life, with a "Sir" before his name) and it is worth noting that in 1949 he might, according to the letter just quoted, have become a Canadian.

"I always find a great charm in Canada," he told Townend, "and sometimes toy with the idea of settling there. The last time I was there was when I came back from Hollywood in 1931, and spent a very pleasant day with Stephen Leacock. I liked him enormously, and felt sad to think that in all probability two such kindred spirits would never set eyes on each other again. (We didn't.)" Since Leacock too might have been lost to Canada if his grandfather's father's farming ventures in South Africa or Kansas had been more successful, Wodehouse's consideration of the country - unless he was merely embellishing his letter for the diversion of Bill Townend, repeating a kind of trick he performed with much of his autobiographical writing, - inevitably makes one wonder why he did not further pursue the possibility of becoming a northerner. Perhaps it was because Niagara Falls failed to grip: "I have never seen any spectacular spot yet that didn't disappoint me," he had written Townend from Hollywood in May of 1931. "Notably, the Grand Canyon, and also Niagara Falls."

Wodehouse's observations of Canada, as reported to Townend, were unique in one respect: they stand virtually alone in his voluminous writings as factual comment based on a first-hand experience involving the country. There is one other detailed chronicle of Canada, but it is based on something he read, not witnessed. In *America, I Like You*, a scattered (and indeed random) collection of pseudo- or semi-autobiographical pieces published in New York in 1956, Wodehouse expressed his admiration for the artistic achievements of a Canadian named Glen Johns. Prefacing his hailing of Mr. Johns with expressions critical of autobiographers who tell too much, spreading ennui and despair among their readers, Wodehouse went on: "Far better, when one feels an autobiography coming on, to remember the splendid words of Mr. Glen Johns of Fort Erie, Ontario, on the occasion of his winning the raw-egg-eating championship of Canada last spring - oh, Fort Erie, Ontario, in the springtime - by eating twenty-four raw eggs in fourteen minutes." Johns explained his feat in terms whose forthrightness appealed to Wodehouse as striking exactly the correct note. He ate one egg, Johns said, and "then I ate another egg, then I ate another egg, then I ate another egg, then I ate another egg, then I ate another egg, then I ate another egg, then..." Wodehouse found in this sterling Canadian example the proper formula for literary bibliography. "Substitute "wrote" for "ate" and "book" for "egg," and an author has said everything that needs to be said."

America, I Like You was a book published in America for an American audience. The edition meant for an English audience, published in London in 1957 as *Over Seventy*, contains some interesting variations from the original, including the tale of Glen Johns, who becomes Glyn Johns: "A writer who is tempted to write a book telling the world how good he is ought to remember the reply made by Mr. Glyn Johns to an interviewer at Fort Erie, Ontario, last spring..." Glyn Johns wins his championship by the same impressive statistics as Glen Johns, and gives the same manly explanation of how he

achieved them; but for his British readers Wodehouse introduces Canadian content that is not hinted at in *America, I Like You*. Glyn Johns, Wodehouse suggested, at some point in his life "experienced some sort of revelation." Taking his cue from the singular specialties into which circus performers are led, such as diving through a hole in the roof into a small tank, Wodehouse constructed John's background.

From his remark to the interviewer, "I owe it all to my mother," I piece his story together like this. His, as I see it, was a happy home, one of those typical Canadian homes where a united family lives its life of love and laughter, but found the most extraordinary difficulty in getting any raw eggs. No stint of boiled, and on Sundays generally a couple poached on toast, but never raw. And all the time he was conscious of this strange power within him. "If only they would let me get at the raw eggs!" he would say to himself. "There, I am convinced, is where my genius lies."

Then one day, of course, Glyn Johns came upon a dozen eggs left defenseless by his mother, gobbled them down and never looked back. Glyn describes his championship round in the same terms as Glen, but adds a different coda: "...then I ate another egg, and, if you follow me, so on." "Substitute "wrote" for "ate" and "book" for "egg"," Wodehouse concluded for his English fans, "and an author with a bank balance has said everything about his career that needs to be said." He had known there was no need to talk to Americans about bank balances and careers.

Thus Plum's observations, personal and literary, of Canada as an actual place. The landscape he covered, from Fort Erie to Niagara Falls, included only a few miles of southwestern Ontario, all of that south of Lake Ontario. He got a little further north if he visited Leacock at Old Brewery Bay, or east if the savant was wearing his professional mask at McGill; but in neither case would he have approached the Canada he undoubtedly knew through the image of it presented in British boys' literature....[But] it is the American West, not the Canadian, that in Wodehouse's books sounds like a distillation from British boy's literature, and it is to America, not Canada, that a few members of the celebrated

Drones Club go to shape up.

Wodehouse does have an occasional character refer to Canada as "a young country," as Psmith does in *Leave it to Psmith* (first printing, 1923); and Psmith thinks of "that growing country." The amiable Lord Emsworth, proprietor of Blandings Castle, thought he had himself visited Canada in 1898 or 1899, characteristically unable to be precise about it. Bertie Wooster has a pal named Biffen who...had "buzzed over to Canada to do a bit of salmon fishing."

Wodehouse has one short story in which all three major protagonists are Canadians, "Three from Dunsterville," published in *The Man Upstairs* in 1914. Dunsterville is a town near Montreal, the only other place name mentioned, and "it is a somnolent town." It could be in either Ontario or Quebec or, for the purposes of the story, in New England or upstate New York; but it is identified as being in Canada, and three of its citizens meet in New York City, whither two of them had gone as young men to make their fortunes. The last to depart Dunsterville is an attractive girl (innocent, like so many of Wodehouse's heroines, to the point of imbecility) and when she catches up with the young men there is some reminiscing about Dunsterville which makes one speculate on how Wodehouse conceived the town. On the way to (or from) school as youngsters, one of the boys had carried the girl's dinner-basket and helped her over the fences. En route they had gathered hickory nuts and persimmons. The hickory nut is admissible as material for Dunsterville recollections, but the persimmon is not listed in *Native Trees of Canada*, and is elsewhere described in learned arboreal sources as having a North American range that stops well south of Point Pelee [the southernmost part of Canada - OM]. The three from Dunsterville also remembered "drawing the water out of the well in that old wooden bucket in the winter, and pouring it out on the playground and skating on it when it froze." Any Canadian father who has provided a rink for his children in the backyard can testify that unless that playground was only a few feet square, its flooding bucket by bucket would have needed the help of probably the entire population of Dunsterville, toiling with the aid of sorcerer's apprentices.

When Wodehouse wrote about Canada in a story, in short, he was likely to escape into a

splendid landscape of the mind that matched his fictional London or Hollywood, or Blandings Castle or the Drones Club. It is therefore somewhat paradoxical that for the one Canadian character he presents as an authentic westerner he does not, for either the man or his setting, provide anything resembling what one would expect from a frontier mythology. Ralston McTodd, an indispensable actor in *Leave it to Psmith*, actually appears in person only briefly, and generally haunts the plot from offstage. His own stage is Saskatchewan, and his particular spot on it is Saskatoon. Psmith, who for his own purposes finds it necessary to impersonate Ralston McTodd, turns out to be surprisingly well informed about the prairie province. "We lived in one of the dry provinces of Canada," he says at one point: Saskatoon was indeed famed as an early temperance colony, and the whole province, when the Psmith books were in gestation, repeatedly rang with the war-cries of "Ban the Bar" and allied movements. At another point Psmith claims to have done his work "in the most solitary surroundings...in a lonely hut on the banks of the Saskatchewan, miles away from human habitation." That was not fantasy: he could still do it.

Most impressively of all, Wodehouse does not make Ralston McTodd out to be a rancher, or a cowboy, or any of the other swashbuckling types that he associates with American westerners. McTodd is a poet, perceived as "the powerful young singer of Saskatoon." The work of that artist is variously described as "lethal", "bound in squashy mauve," and "rather poisonous." A single line of McTodd's poetry, from his *Songs of Squalor*, is used in *Leave it to Psmith*, and it is a tantalizing sample: "Across the pale parabola of Joy..." Nobody in the novel knows what the line means, but if anybody had thought to ask McTodd he might have told them it was that marvelous vision of deep winter on the plains, a chinook arch.

McTodd is no mere scribbler but a writer with an international reputation, a man with a standing invitation to visit Blandings Castle as the guest of the chatelaine, Lady Constance Keeble. The host at the Castle, her brother Lord Emsworth, hates both London and "literary fellows," but is nonetheless dispatched to the former to meet the example of the latter who was Ralston McTodd; he is bemused enough by McTodd's background to remark of Canada,

"Apparently they have poets out there." ("And," demanded his lordship, ever a fair-minded man, "why not? A remarkably growing country.")

Unlike many of Wodehouse's young men, his Canadian poet is neither kindly nor a mental lightweight. He is presented as a tough-minded intellectual, "gloomy-looking...with long and disordered hair...of highly-strung temperament...[and] a sullen air." ("He is not," Psmith observes, "a person for whom the man of sensibility and refinement would lightly allow himself to be mistaken.") McTodd's temperament sets up the whole plot of *Leave it to Psmith*: almost at the beginning of the novel, he angrily storms out of sight, for a reason that must be unusual even among Saskatoon poets: "They had some people to dinner, and there was chicken, and Cynthia gave all the gilets to the guests, and her husband bounded out of his seat with a wild cry, and, shouting "You *know* I love those things better than anything in the world!" rushed from the house, never to return!" It was his sixth such departure (although not always because of gilets) so one may presume that the Canadian poet and his lady would some day be re-united.

If McTodd's physical background was a real and not a mythical landscape, much of his behavior was clearly fantastic, and he thus combines in his own person his creator's remarkable gifts for commenting, in light prose and absurd plots, on such varied phenomena as idle young men, the British aristocracy, American millionaires, journalism, and life in places as far apart as Hollywood, New York and London. McTodd is almost a unique Wodehouse character, for most of Wodehouse's young men who accomplish things are likeable, and McTodd plainly is not. His location in Canada is not surprising in one sense: he was not the kind of Englishman or American Wodehouse liked to invent, and given his role in *Leave it to Psmith* he could not have been either. But he could have been an Australian or a South African without disturbing his role, and both those parts of the Empire had place names as euphonious as Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Wodehouse loved the sound of words, and I have no doubt that the prairie city and province appealed to him simply as a sort of music. As for Ralston McTodd, Psmith says: "wouldn't call McTodd a bad name, as names go. Don't you think there is a sort of Highland strength about it...You don't think it has a sort of wild romantic ring?"

Plum's Canada

What it has is exactly the right ring for a young poet from Saskatoon in the early 1920s. The Scots element in public life in Saskatchewan was prominent from territorial days onward, and a succession of premiers and cabinet ministers had Scottish names. Saskatoon and Saskatchewan are derived from Indian sounds. Whether Wodehouse, who was never in Saskatchewan, sensed from afar that any poet Saskatoon had in Psmith's days would have a Scottish name, or that one of the best possible homes for a poet named Ralston McTodd was a city called Saskatoon, hardly matters. Either way, he had it right.

Perhaps that is why the placing of McTodd in Saskatoon has never led to a general reviling, or even a mild criticism, of Wodehouse throughout the city. City Council has not debated Wodehouse's McTodd, and the Board of Trade has passed no condemnatory resolutions. Regina has not used McTodd to taunt its chief urban rival. In all that Wodehouse escaped the fate of Rudyard Kipling, whose publication of "Our Lady of the Snows," no doubt meant as a tribute to Canada, was taken up in the House of Commons in 1897 as if it were a calculated libel, intended to portray the country falsely as a snow-bound and primitive community. It is too bad Wodehouse provoked no such reaction: he would have loved it.